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# Going green: Students making the choice to avoid red meat

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# GOING GREEN

STUDENTS MAKING THE CHOICE TO AVOID RED MEAT

BY **HALEY BRASE** DESIGN **ALIXANDRIA COLLINS** PHOTOGRAPHY **SAM GREENE**





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## “Contrary to common belief, when eating a properly balanced diet, vegetarians do not have to take supplements or vitamins.”

Being a vegetarian or pescatarian could be hard in the red meat-eating Midwest, but for three ISU students, it's their diet.

Becoming a pescatarian this year, Rae Hattan has found out what it is like after growing up in a red meat-eating household her entire life.

“Eating meat gives me a heavy feeling in my stomach or weighs me down,” Hattan says. “Throughout my first few weeks [of becoming a pescatarian], I felt a difference in my body, a change for the better.”

Hattan did not do this as a new year's resolution, but as a challenge to see if she could and what it was like.

“When I told my family, ‘I think I'm going to try being a pescatarian,’ it was a slow process,” Hattan says. “My family was inspired and my sister also wanted to try it. My parents have decided to eat less red meat, but they aren't pescatarians, they did not cut all meat out of their diet.”

Mariah Anderson has been a pescatarian since around fifth grade because her mom is a pescatarian, so to her, it has been her normal diet for most of her life.

“I could imagine giving up hamburgers, but couldn't imagine giving up tuna sandwiches,” Anderson says.

She decided to become a pescatarian because when she was younger, her family was cooking veal. When she asked what it was, her mom explained to her it was from a baby calf.

“I had that moment of connection that meat is animal flesh and muscle,” Anderson says. “I loved animals all my life, and it made me really upset to think about eating a baby cow. I have no problem with other people eating meat, but it grossed me out, and I decided that I would rather cut it out of my own diet.”

She chose to be a pescatarian because she had different views of the animals.

“The reason that I didn't cut out meat altogether is that personally, I don't view fish and seafood to be as complex or intelligent as poultry and mammals,” Anderson says. “I could be incorrect about

that, but that was just my belief when I was ten years old and made the choice to be a pescatarian, and it's just habit now.”

Amra Softic, a vegetarian for five years now, made the choice for three reasons: the environment, animal welfare and her health.

“Meat production requires a lot of energy and is detrimental to our environment,” Softic says. “Everything from water pollution to greenhouse gas production.”

Softic says animal welfare is usually the first thing people connect vegetarians to as well as being hippies, but she does not think eating meat is moral, it is an opinion. Her opinion is it is better for her health.

“Studies that have compared vegetarian diets vs. omnivorous diets have shown decreased risk of heart disease, type II diabetes, along with numerous other diseases,” Softic says. “Contrary to common belief, when eating a properly balanced diet, vegetarians do not have to take supplements or vitamins.”

At Iowa State, when she was living in the dorms on a meal plan, Anderson had trouble with the vegetarian options running out too quickly.

“Even when I got to the dining hall right at the start of lunch, the vegetarian options had often run out,” Anderson says. “I was in a year-long Twitter conversation with ISU Dining about why they always ran out of falafel at 11 a.m.!”

When Softic was on a meal plan, she also found it difficult to eat a balanced vegetarian diet on campus. Her choices seemed to be salad or high carbohydrates in foods such as pizza and pasta. According to Softic, the meal bundles did not offer much for vegetarian options, unless she wanted salad, which she was not in favor of.

Now, living off campus, she goes to Aldi to find food to cook, since she rarely goes out to eat.

ISU Dining uses past attendance to know how much vegetarian options they should offer.



"We keep track of the amount of food we prepare based on the number of customers we will have at any given meal period and day," says Jeremy Bowker, the creator of the menu for all you care to eat residential facilities. "We base this off of prior year's attendance and the amount of meal plans we have issued to our students. It is not an exact science but an industry standard."

A few examples of options are cheese pizza, veggies burgers, adding more plain vegetable options and whole and ancient grain dishes, Bowker says.

"We have increased the amount of protein options like tofu and tempeh and are adding more bean and lentil recipes to our menus," Bowker says.

Now, if Anderson eats on campus, she will eat cheese pizza or veggie burritos.

For Hattan, she mostly eats at the cafe in the design building, since she is a biological pre-medical illustration major. She finds food labeled vegetarian, and her usual consumption involves hummus, wraps, salads, vegetarian mexican burritos and sandwiches.

So far, she has not gotten tired of the food because they switch it up, says Hattan.

The menus at ISU are based on a two to four week cycle, says Bowker.

This school year, Hattan transferred from her community college in her hometown to Iowa State to begin her junior year.

"I love the different foods I have been able to try that I normally wouldn't," Hattan says. "It's exciting to meet other vegetarians because we talk about what recipes we've tried and what we like to eat on a regular basis."

She has found it to be more difficult living on her own and being a pescatarian.

"Back home, my parents would buy the groceries and were on board with the whole thing," Hattan says. "It's more expensive to go out and buy vegetables and prepare them. I don't think it's necessarily cheaper to become a pescatarian. It takes time and money."

When at home, her and her family could prepare pescatarian meals, and when living in Ames, she eats vegetable soups, beans, cheese quesadillas, eggs and dairy products, but says she is not much of a cook.

Traveling and eating in rural areas has been another difficult part about being a pescatarian.

"I remember this summer, I stopped at a restaurant, in a tiny town, near my hometown," Hattan says. "They had a veggie burger on the menu, so I ordered it, because everything else had meat in it, but it turned out to be a burger with vegetables on it. I don't see how it was different than the other burgers on the menu because they also had lettuce and tomato on them, but it was just funny."

Hattan finds humor in how people depict what a pescatarian is, but she does not plan on always being one. However, Anderson is passionate about being a pescatarian because "it's just a part of her," even if other people do not understand where she is coming from.

"When I was younger, I had to put up with a lot of dumb comments and questions, like 'If you're a vegetarian, can you eat animal crackers?'" and the classic, 'God put animals on this earth for humans to eat!'" Anderson says. "Luckily, those have dwindled. I think society has become a lot more accepting to different lifestyles."

Softic was surprised with how people would react at Iowa State when she told them she was a vegetarian if it came up in the conversation. She says she does not push her vegetarian lifestyle onto them, yet people get defensive when she says she is a vegetarian.

"While some people think that it's cool that I am vegetarian I found it particularly troublesome around most Midwest or ag students," Softic says. "I am a biology student in the college of ag, so I am around a lot of students who grew up on farms. While some students want to learn more about becoming a vegetarian, others will turn their cheek to the idea."

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